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Appropriations Subcommittee Structure: History of Changes from 1920-2005

Updated March 9, 2005

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Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE 09 MAR 2005	2. REPORT TYPE N/A	3. DATES COVERED -		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Appropriations Subcommittee Structure: History of Changes from 1920-2005			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
			5b. GRANT NUMBER	
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)			5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
			5e. TASK NUMBER	
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Congressional Research Service The Library of Congress 101 Independence Ave SE Washington, DC 20540-7500			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: a. REPORT unclassified			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT SAR	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 14
b. ABSTRACT unclassified				
c. THIS PAGE unclassified				

Appropriations Subcommittee Structure: History of Changes from 1920-2005

Summary

This report details the evolution of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees' subcommittee structure from the 1920s to the present. In 1920, the House adopted a change in its rules to consolidate jurisdiction over all appropriations in the Appropriations Committee. After the enactment of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, the House reorganized its Appropriations Committee by establishing for the first time a set of subcommittees to consider appropriations bills based on the administrative organization of the executive branch. The Senate followed suit in 1922, and the two chambers have continued under that basic organizational approach since that time.

The evolution of the modern Appropriations subcommittee structure can be divided into four eras. The first era, stretching roughly from the initial reorganization in the 1920s until the end of the Second World War, was marked by stability. Most of the changes in Appropriations structure resulted from combining bills (e.g., the Treasury Department bill with the Post Office Department bill beginning in 1924), although one new bill (and subcommittee) was created when the appropriations bill for the Department of Labor was split off from the Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, and Labor bill in 1939.

The second era, from the end of the Second World War through 1970, saw multiple changes. During this period, Congress attempted to keep pace with executive branch reorganization (e.g., creation of subcommittees to consider appropriations for the new Departments of Defense in 1947 and Transportation in 1967), and changing national priorities (e.g., creation of a separate appropriations bill, and later subcommittee, for foreign operations).

The third era, from 1971 through 2003, was marked by a renewed stability. Although this era saw many changes in the overall committee structures of the House and Senate, the structure of the Appropriations subcommittees in both chambers remained mostly unchanged until 2003. Since 2003, there have been major changes in organization involving nearly every subcommittee. In 2003, both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees merged their subcommittees on Transportation and Treasury and created a new subcommittee to consider appropriations for the newly created Department of Homeland Security. In 2005, both chambers undertook major reorganizations, eliminating three subcommittees in the House and one in the Senate.

This report will be updated to reflect any changes in Appropriations subcommittee structure.

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Appropriations Subcommittee Structure: History of Changes from 1920-2005

Introduction

Article I, Section 9 of the U.S. Constitution provides that “No money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law.” The Constitution does not, however, prescribe any specific structure or process for making appropriations. The committee structure established by Congress assigns a prominent role to the Appropriations Committees of the House and Senate for both the development of appropriations legislation and oversight over budget execution. The Appropriations Committees, in turn, have created a system of subcommittees designed to facilitate their ability to carry out these tasks. The number and jurisdictions of these subcommittees has evolved to meet changing needs and circumstances.

For example, reorganization has been undertaken in order to adjust to a new executive branch department. Although reorganization of subcommittee jurisdiction in the House and Senate Appropriations Committees was not formally part of the legislation creating a new Department of Homeland Security (DHS), it was frequently discussed as a possible adjunct reform.¹ Under such a proposal, the subcommittee structure of the Appropriations Committees in both the House and Senate was to be reorganized so that appropriations for the various agencies proposed to be consolidated into a new DHS could likewise be consolidated.² After the legislation establishing the new department was signed into law, the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee announced that a new subcommittee would indeed be established in the House.³ This modification of subcommittee structure affected eight of the existing subcommittees and was one of the most extensive reorganizations of the Appropriations Committees since the 1920s. Shortly thereafter, a similar change was made in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Reorganization can also be undertaken in order to adapt to changes in congressional priorities. At the start of the 109th Congress, the House and Senate undertook a second major change in subcommittee structure. This reorganization

¹ For example, the concept was endorsed by The Brookings Institution, which stated that subcommittee reorganization would “institutionalize a broad perspective on homeland security.” Ivo H. Daalder et. al., *Assessing the Department of Homeland Security* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2002), p. 51.

² Although there is no formal requirement that the House and Senate maintain parallel appropriations structures, the two chambers have historically found it practical to do so.

³ See “Chairman Young Announces Homeland Security Reorganization,” Jan. 29, 2003, available at [http://www.house.gov/appropriations/news/108_1/04homelandreorg.htm].

affected 10 subcommittees in the House, eliminating three, and eight subcommittees in the Senate, eliminating one.

Consolidation and Initial Stability, 1920-1946

By the end of the First World War the idea that the budgetary process should be more centralized gained prominence, and ultimately resulted in passage of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921.⁴ In anticipation of the more centralized executive budget system provided under the act, the House also changed its rules to require that all appropriations be considered by the Appropriations Committee.⁵ During the late 19th century, congressional rules had provided that jurisdiction over certain general appropriations bills to committees other than the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.⁶ Notably, the appropriations bills for the District of Columbia, Indian affairs, Agriculture Department, Army, Navy, Post Office Department, and rivers and harbors (i.e., public works) were considered by the appropriate legislative committees.

In addition, the Bureau of the Budget, newly established under the Budget and Accounting Act, recommended that appropriations bills be reorganized along administrative lines, with appropriations for salaries and expenses being carried in the same bill as funding for programs and activities administered by a department. This arrangement had previously existed only in the Department of Agriculture appropriations bill. The House Appropriations Committee adopted the bureau's concept and reorganized the structure of general appropriations bills and its subcommittees so extensively that only the structure of the Agriculture bill remained essentially unchanged.

Prior to this reorganization, appropriations bills (and subcommittees) tended to be organized along topical lines. For example, the military activities of the War Department were considered in appropriations bills reported by the Military Affairs Committee, and the activities of the Corps of Engineers were considered in River and Harbor appropriations bills reported by the Commerce Committee. The salaries and contingent expenses for the civilian administration of the department, however, were carried in the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial bill, which was within the jurisdiction of the Appropriations Committee. A similar division existed for most departments, and was true even for agencies whose appropriations were wholly within the jurisdiction of the Appropriations Committee. Funding for the activities of agencies as disparate as the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Coast Guard, and the Bureau of Mines were carried in the Sundry Civil bill, which was frequently

⁴ P.L. 13, 67th Congress, 42 Stat. 20-27.

⁵ H.Res. 324, 66th Congress. For its consideration by the House see "Change in the Rules of the House," *Congressional Record*, vol. 59, June 1, 1920, pp. 8102-8121.

⁶ For more on the appropriations process in this era, see Charles H. Stewart, *Budget Reform Politics: The Design of the Appropriations Process in the House of Representatives, 1865-1921* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

the largest of the general appropriations bills. Nevertheless, their salaries and expenses were generally funded in the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial bill.

After its reorganization, the House Appropriations Committee comprised the following subcommittees:

1. Agriculture Department
2. Commerce and Labor Departments
3. Deficiencies⁷
4. District of Columbia
5. Independent Offices (including the Executive Office of the President)
6. Interior Department
7. Legislative Establishment
8. Navy Department and the Navy
9. Post Office Department
10. State and Justice Departments (including the judiciary)
11. Treasury Department
12. War Department and the Army (both military and civil functions⁸)

By longstanding custom, the House originates all general appropriations bills.⁹ As a consequence, it is the House that generally decides the content of the bills. By originating appropriations bills corresponding to its new administratively based organizational structure, the House created a jurisdictional problem for the Senate, which retained a system based on topical organization of appropriations bills as well as multiple committees sharing jurisdiction over general appropriations bills. Confronted with the difficulty of considering the reorganized appropriations bills with its now outmoded system, the Senate reorganized its appropriations jurisdiction and subcommittees in 1922.¹⁰

Information available on congressional subcommittees, including those of the Appropriations Committees, is sparse and unsystematic prior to enactment of the

⁷ Unlike the other subcommittees, the Deficiencies Subcommittee's jurisdiction remained essentially topical. Rather than provide funding for an established group of agencies and programs in a single annual bill, its jurisdiction frequently involved multiple bills. These bills provided supplemental appropriations for various unanticipated needs of programs otherwise funded in regular appropriations. However, the Subcommittee was also responsible for funding additional items not already provided in regular appropriations bills, and financed obligations already entered into in advance of appropriations authority (such as the Lend-Lease program during World War II).

⁸ Civil functions consisted largely of the work of the Army Corps of Engineers, such as river and harbor projects, flood control, and maintenance of the Panama Canal.

⁹ For more on the origination of general appropriations bills, see CRS Report RL31399, *The Origination Clause of the U.S. Constitution: Interpretation and Enforcement*, by James V. Saturno.

¹⁰ S.Res. 213, 67th Congress. For its consideration by the Senate, see "Consideration of Appropriations Bills," *Congressional Record*, vol. 62, Mar. 1-Mar. 4, Mar. 6, 1922, pp. 3199-3207, 3279-3291, 3331-3344, 3375-3392, 3400, 3418-3432.

Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946.¹¹ From available hearings and other committee documents, it appears that during this era the Appropriations Committees continued the practice of having each subcommittee (other than the Deficiencies Subcommittee) be responsible for drafting one of the regular appropriations bills.¹² Data on appropriations bills may also generally be used to identify subcommittee structure.

One conclusion that may be drawn from the appropriations bills considered in this period is that the subcommittee structure of the Appropriations Committees was relatively stable. Other than name changes, the salient changes in appropriations bill structure (and, presumably, subcommittee structure as well) between 1922 and 1946 seem to have been limited to the following:

- combination of the bills for the Treasury and Post Office Departments beginning in the 68th Congress (1924);¹³
- combination of the Commerce and Labor Departments bill with the State and Justice Departments bill beginning in the 68th Congress (1924);¹⁴
- separation of the War Department and Army bill into two bills, one for the Military Establishment and the other for War Department Civil Functions, beginning in the 75th Congress (1937);¹⁵

¹¹ P.L. 601, 79th Congress, 60 Stat. 812-852.

¹² In addition, there appear to have been occasional subcommittees established for special purposes, such as a House Appropriations Subcommittee on Permanent Appropriations (73rd Congress), which was responsible for recommending the repeal of various permanent appropriations.

¹³ In the 68th Congress, the Senate subcommittee maintained subunits for separate consideration of Treasury and Post Office items respectively, although a single bill was considered.

¹⁴ In the 68th Congress, the Senate subcommittee maintained subunits for separate consideration of State and Justice and Commerce and Labor items respectively, although a single bill was considered.

¹⁵ However, from available congressional documents it does not appear that this division was reflected in a similar change in the subcommittee structure. During the debate on the civil functions bill, Rep. J. Buell Snyder simply remarked that Rep. James P. Buchanan, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, had directed that the estimates for the War Department be handled in two separate measures (*Congressional Record*, vol. 81, June 15, 1937, p. 5733). In the 80th Congress (for which there is reliable information on Appropriations subcommittee structure), there was a single subcommittee and separate military establishment and civil function bills.

- separation of the Labor Department (and the Federal Security Agency¹⁶) from the Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, and Labor bill beginning in the 76th Congress (1939);¹⁷ and
- inclusion of the Judiciary in the Legislative Branch bill during the 78th Congress (1943-1944).

Reorganization and Multiple Changes, 1947-1970

One of the chief aims of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 was to bring about a modernization of Congress's committee system, including its subcommittees. As a result, unlike the earlier period, information on subcommittee structure since 1946 is more readily available. In the 80th Congress (1947-1948), the Appropriations Committees in both chambers had the following structure:

1. Agriculture
2. Deficiencies
3. District of Columbia
4. Government Corporations
5. Independent Offices
6. Interior Department
7. Legislative
8. State, Justice, and Commerce Departments and the Judiciary
9. Treasury Department and Post Office
10. Labor Department and Federal Security Agency
11. War Department
12. Navy Department

The idea of modernizing congressional committee structure and operations embodied in the Legislative Reorganization Act was paralleled by an interest in developing a more modern federal administrative apparatus to supplant the one that had grown in fits and starts to meet the challenges of the Depression and World War II. Because appropriations bills continued to be written along organizational lines, these changes in the executive branch had an impact on appropriations subcommittee structure. Four changes in party control in the House between 1947 and 1955 also contributed to an environment well disposed to multiple changes in appropriations subcommittee jurisdiction. This evolution saw the number of subcommittees

¹⁶ The Federal Security Agency was established by Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1939, grouping the Office of Education, Public Health Service, Social Security Board, U.S. Employment Service, Civilian Conservation Corps, and National Youth Administration. The agency was abolished by Reorganization Plan No. 7 of 1953, and its functions transferred to the newly created Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

¹⁷ This change in bill structure, however, reflected a change in the subcommittee structure of the House only. The Senate maintained a single subcommittee for consideration of separate appropriations bills for the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce and Department of Labor-Federal Security Agency until the 80th Congress (1947).

fluctuate between a low of 10¹⁸ and a high of 15.¹⁹ Despite this fluctuation, during this era it appears that the Appropriations Committees generally continued the practice of having each subcommittee be responsible for drafting one of the regular appropriations bills.²⁰

Subcommittee Development

Appropriations Subcommittees that were created, abolished, or reorganized from the 80th Congress until 1970 are as follows:

Government Corporations. A subcommittee (and appropriations bill) specifically pertaining to government corporations operated in both the House and Senate only during the 80th Congress (1947-1948).

Public Works. Jurisdiction over Army civil functions was transferred to the Deficiencies Subcommittees in both the House and Senate for the 81st Congress (1949-1950). The Senate subsequently transferred jurisdiction over deficiencies to the full committee, and a separate subcommittee for Army civil functions was established, in the 82nd Congress and continuing through the 83rd (1951-1954). The House continued to operate a Deficiencies and Army Civil Functions Subcommittee in the 82nd Congress (1951-1952), but transferred jurisdiction over deficiencies to the full committee, and created a subcommittee combining Army civil functions with military construction in the 83rd Congress (1953-1954). A Public Works Subcommittee (including the Army civil functions as well as the Atomic Energy Commission, Bureau of Reclamation, and power marketing administrations) was established by both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees beginning in the 84th Congress (1955). The Senate maintained separate subunits within the Public Works Subcommittee to consider matters related to the Atomic Energy Commission and Tennessee Valley Authority and related to the Bureau of Reclamation and Department of the Interior power marketing associations. These subunits operated between the 84th and 90th Congresses (1955-1968). A single bill continued to be reported from the subcommittee during this period.

Deficiencies. A separate subcommittee to consider deficiencies was discontinued in the Senate after the 81st Congress, and in the House after the 82nd Congress. Jurisdiction over deficiencies and supplementals was subsequently exercised by the full committee. A Deficiencies Subcommittee was reestablished by the House Appropriations Committee for the 86th through 88th Congresses (1959-1964), after which the jurisdiction was again exercised by the full committee. The

¹⁸ In House during the 81st and 82nd Congresses (1949-1952), and in the Senate during the 81st through 83rd Congresses (1949-1942).

¹⁹ In House during the 86th and 87th Congresses (1959-1962).

²⁰ There were exceptions to this, for example, in cases when the Senate committee did not immediately alter its appropriations subcommittee structure to mirror that of the House. In addition, in 1950, a single omnibus appropriations bill was considered comprising titles recommended by the subcommittees.

Senate Subcommittee on Deficiencies was reestablished for the second session of the 87th Congress, and met through the 91st Congress (1962-1970).

Department of Defense. The War and Navy Departments were consolidated to create a National Military Establishment (later the Department of Defense) in 1947,²¹ and their respective appropriations subcommittees were combined to create an Armed Services Subcommittee beginning in the 81st Congress (1949). Renamed the Department of Defense Subcommittee in the 84th Congress (1955), the House Subcommittee maintained three separate subunits for consideration of Army, Navy, and Air Force matters during the 84th and 85th Congresses (1955-1959), and the Senate maintained a separate subunit for intelligence activities between the 91st and 94th Congresses (1969-1976). During these years, there continued to be a single Department of Defense appropriations bill.

Military Construction. Military construction was considered as a part of the Defense Appropriations bill prior to the 83rd Congress. Between the 83rd Congress and the first session of the 85th Congress (1953-1957), appropriations for military construction were carried primarily in deficiency and supplemental appropriations measures. In the 83rd Congress (1953-1954), the House operated a Civil Functions and Military Construction Subcommittee, but it is otherwise not clear whether military construction matters were considered by a subcommittee in this period. A separate Military Construction Subcommittee was created by the House Appropriations Committee beginning in the second session of the 85th Congress (1958), and a separate bill for military construction matters was considered for the first time that same year. The Senate Appropriations Committee established a separate subunit for military construction within the Defense Subcommittee in the 86th Congress (1959-1960), and then a separate subcommittee beginning in the 87th Congress (1961).

Legislative Branch. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees established a subcommittee to consider both legislative and judiciary matters in the 83rd Congress (1953-1954). The two chambers subsequently returned to the former practice of a separate Legislative Subcommittee, with judiciary matters being considered by the same subcommittee as the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, beginning in the 84th Congress (1955).

Foreign Operations. A separate bill to fund foreign aid programs (then called the Mutual Security bill) was considered beginning in the 83rd Congress (1953), with jurisdiction exercised by the full committee in both the House and Senate. A separate subcommittee was established by the House Appropriations Committee beginning in the 84th Congress (1955). Foreign operations jurisdiction continued to be exercised at the full committee level by the Senate Appropriations Committee until the 91st Congress (1969).

Commerce. Jurisdiction over Commerce Department appropriations was exercised by a separate subcommittee in the 84th through 86th Congresses (1955-1960). The subcommittee's jurisdiction was combined with the General Government

²¹ P.L. 253, 80th Congress, 61 Stat. 495-510.

Subcommittee for the first session of the 87th Congress (1961). Since the second session of the 87th Congress (1962), jurisdiction has been exercised by a subcommittee with jurisdiction over the State, Justice, and Commerce Departments and the judiciary.

General Government. In the House, a separate subcommittee was established for general government matters (including the Executive Office of the President) in the 84th through 86th Congress (1955-1960). In the Senate, jurisdiction over general government matters was exercised by a Subcommittee on Independent Offices and General Government Matters beginning in the 84th Congress, although separate appropriations bills for independent offices and general government matters were considered. In both the House and Senate jurisdiction over general government matters was combined with the Commerce Department Subcommittee in the first session of the 87th Congress (1961). Jurisdiction over general government matters was subsequently combined with the Treasury Department and Post Office Subcommittee in both chambers beginning in the second session of the 87th Congress (1962).

Transportation. A separate subcommittee was established to consider appropriations for the newly created Transportation Department by both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees beginning in the 90th Congress (1967).

Renewed Stability, 1971-2002

With the creation of the Transportation Subcommittee by the House Appropriations Committee in 1967, the total number of appropriations subcommittees in the House stabilized at 13. The last subcommittee added in the Senate was the Foreign Operations Subcommittee in 1969, bringing the total in that body to 14. Since the elimination of a separate Senate Subcommittee on Deficiencies at the end of the 91st Congress (1969-1970), the two chambers have maintained parallel appropriations subcommittee structures.

There were no additions, and few major changes, in the subcommittee structure of either the House or Senate Appropriations Committees between 1971 and 2003. The changes that did occur involved primarily changes in subcommittee names to reflect changes in agency and departmental status. For example, the title of the Independent Offices bill has evolved with the creation of the Departments of Housing and Urban Development in 1965, and Veterans' Affairs in 1988; the Public Works bill became known as the Energy and Water bill after the creation of the Department of Energy in 1977; and the title of the Departments of Labor and Health Education and Welfare was modified to reflect the creation of a separate Department of Education in 1979. However, these changes did not represent major shifts in appropriations subcommittee jurisdictions.

Major Changes, 2003 and 2005

In response to the establishment of a Department of Homeland Security, in January 2003, the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee announced that a new appropriations subcommittee would be created. This new subcommittee, consolidating appropriations jurisdiction from eight existing subcommittees over the various entities comprising the new department, was the first major reorganization of appropriations subcommittee structure in either chamber in over 30 years. The new subcommittee was formally established when the committee organized for the 108th Congress in February 2003. In order to keep the number of appropriations subcommittees at 13, the committee also merged the subcommittees responsible for Department of Transportation appropriations with that responsible for Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government appropriations. The Senate Appropriations Committee made a similar change when it organized in March 2003.

At the beginning of the 109th Congress, the House Appropriations Committee undertook another substantial reorganization, reducing the number of subcommittees from 13 to 10. This reduction was achieved by eliminating the Subcommittees on the Legislative Branch, District of Columbia, and the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies. The jurisdiction over the Legislative Branch appropriations bill was retained by the full committee, and the following major changes were made in subcommittee organization:

- creation of a new subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, combining the previous jurisdiction of the Military Construction subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as those portions of the Department of Defense concerning the Defense Health Program and military facilities sustainment and housing accounts;
- jurisdiction over the Department Housing and Urban Development, the federal judiciary, and the District of Columbia transferred to the former Transportation, and Treasury Subcommittee;
- jurisdiction over the federal judiciary transferred from the former Subcommittee on the Departments of Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary, while that subcommittee would gain jurisdiction over NASA, the National Science Foundation, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (all formerly exercised by the VA-HUD subcommittee) becoming the Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and Commerce;
- jurisdiction over other agencies formerly exercised by the VA-HUD Subcommittee shifted to the Interior Subcommittee (the Environmental Protection Agency) and Labor-HHS Subcommittee (AmeriCorps);

- jurisdiction over Weatherization Assistance Grants exercised by the Labor-HHS Subcommittee, and energy related accounts exercised by the Interior Subcommittee transferred to the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee.

This reorganization left the House with the following subcommittees:

1. Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies;
2. Subcommittee on Defense;
3. Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies;
4. Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs;
5. Subcommittee on Homeland Security;
6. Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies;
7. Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies;
8. Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies;
9. Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and Commerce, and Related Agencies;
10. Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia.

The Senate Appropriations Committee subsequently adopted a reorganization plan as well, eliminating the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies and making the following major changes:

- jurisdiction over Veterans Affairs transferred to the Subcommittee on Military Construction;
- jurisdiction over the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the federal judiciary transferred to the former Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury and General Government;
- jurisdiction over NASA, the National Science Foundation, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy transferred to the former Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary;
- jurisdiction over AmeriCorps transferred to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies;
- jurisdiction over the Environmental Protection Agency transferred to the Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies;
- jurisdiction over energy related accounts formerly exercised by the Interior Subcommittee transferred to the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development;

- jurisdiction over the State Department transferred to the former Subcommittee on Foreign Operations.

This reorganization left the Senate with the following subcommittees:

1. Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies;
2. Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science;
3. Subcommittee on Defense;
4. Subcommittee on the District of Columbia;
5. Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development;
6. Subcommittee on Homeland Security;
7. Subcommittee on Interior, and Related Agencies;
8. Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies;
9. Subcommittee on Legislative Branch;
10. Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs;
11. Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, and Related Programs;
12. Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, The Judiciary, and Housing and Urban Development.